

Dear Members of the Joint Committee of Public Health.

My name is Susan D. Pawloski-Burke. I am a parent of a 12 year old son diagnosed with Classic Autism. I submit this letter in favor of HB 5558, the purpose of which is to expand ABA/autism services.

Our child has benefited greatly from receiving ABA services. The first time we were introduced to ABA services was when our son was two years old. He was participating in the Birth to Three early intervention program overseen by Easter Seals. He had speech and developmental delays. Initial services include speech therapy and occupational therapy. We noticed minimal progress with these therapies. His case was reevaluated and it was decided to provide ABA/DTI services as provided by Benhaven. It was incredible the positive changes that occurred with his behavior, behavior that was interfering with his ability to learn. When he transitioned to the public school at the age of three, he was introduced to the school system's self-described "eclectic approach". Progress again was limited and there was actually some regression noted. We requested an IEE and the school system contracted with CREC/River Street School at Coltsville. Nicole Smith, BCBA, conducted the evaluation, retooled his program and again, gains were made using ABA methodologies. One of the biggest advances in my son's behavior at that time (when he was one month away from his 7th birthday) was his achieving success in toileting. Nicole Smith drew up a specific behavior plan along with explicit instructions for the school staff and a home program. My son was toilet trained in ONE WEEK, both urination and defecation, remaining unsoiled both in daytime and nighttime. This was after two years of various plans being devised by the school system and attempted by the school and ourselves. I mention this example from our lives because I want to impress upon the reader what a difference ABA services made in our son's life, our lives and the lives of the general community by giving the tools to master this basic activity of daily living. Our son currently attends the River Street School in Windsor, which is a CREC school that uses ABA in order to instruct children with autism. He continues to make gains and we are hopeful that he will someday be able participate in some meaningful work when he is an adult.

All of us as parents want our children to be happy, productive and independent as possible. ABA is the way for many of our children with autism to achieve this, regardless of how old those children are. As a parent I want the best for my child and all children. As a taxpayer, I would rather see money spend upfront to provide services, particularly ABA services, to those children with classic autism making them more productive and self-sufficient and less dependent on future services. And without these services provided upfront, there will most certainly be a need for extensive, costly future services, either from Social Services, Mental Health, Developmental Services, the Department of Correction or a combination of all of them. I encourage all of you to join me in increasing these services now by voting in favor of HB 5558.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan D. Pawloski-Burke
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